



DEPARTMENT OF CALIFORNIA HIGHWAY PATROL

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CALIFORNIA TRAFFIC DEATHS DROP – LOWEST IN DECADES

SACRAMENTO -- Paced by double-digit declines in alcohol-related deaths and injuries, fatalities on the state's highways in 1997 declined to the lowest level in 38 years, according to the California Highway Patrol.

The CHP's Statewide Integrated Traffic Records System (SWITRS) showed that 3,671 people died in traffic crashes in 1997, down 7.6 percent from 3,972 in 1996. Fatalities were the lowest since 1959, when 3,588 persons died.

Alcohol-involved deaths in 1997 dropped 12.3 percent, from 1,254 to 1,100. Alcohol-involved injuries declined 12.5 percent, from 35,654 to 31,189.

"Enforcement and education have paid off," said Commissioner D.O. Helmick.

"Thousands of Californians are alive and well today because motorists made decisions not to drink and drive."

Helmick said DUI checkpoints, increased patrols on county roads, maximum enforcement periods, sober graduation and designated driver programs have all contributed to lower the alcohol-involved deaths and injuries.

In addition, Helmick said, the overall decline in traffic deaths and injuries is attributable to the use of safety belts and observation of the speed limits.

The state's 1997 mileage death rate -- the number of traffic fatalities per 100 million miles of vehicle travel -- dropped to 1.29, an historic low. The mileage death rate was 1.42 in 1996.